

# Asian Trash Cinema

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*Dedicated to the Art of Action and Exploitation films*



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# Asian Trash Cinema

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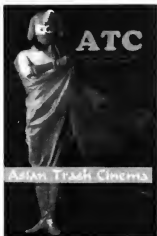
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**Volume 1 / #7**

# Asian Trash Cinema

Editor: Tom Weisser • Manager: Scott Williams • Design/Artwork: Francine Dali

## Editorial from Tom Weisser



And exactly what is this? Is it a publicity shot from *Yankee and the Geisha Girl*? Not quite. You see, back in May, your (amazingly fortunate) editor married beautiful **Yuko Mihara** in a traditional Japanese wedding. It all took place at a Shintoism Shrine in Osaka. It's with much pride, I'm sharing this wedding photo with you.

As of this issue, **Asian Trash Cinema** will now be published 6 times a year. This means a new issue should reach you around the second week of each alternating month. In the next issue we will have a brand new subscription form, in the meantime-- if you want to subscribe (or renew): send \$30 [check, M.O. or credit card] to ATC, PO Box 16-1917, Miami FL 33116.

The front cover is a salute to the **Female Ninja: Magic Chronicles** series. Don't miss Daniel Grissom's terrific article (starting on page 31) honoring these sexy warriors. The back cover features **Natsuki Ozawa** (star of *Zero Woman* and *XX: Beautiful Victims*). Recently, Natsuki made Japanese history by being the first girl to appear totally nude (no fogging!) in her taboo-breaking photo-book entitled *Intimate Ozawa*. Now, since pubic hair and genitals have finally emerged in Japanese publications, speculation is high that censoring/fogging may soon be a thing of the past in Japanese movies as well. Time will tell.

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by Tom Weisser

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## REVIEWS

SUKEBAN DEKA*-A yo-yo is a girl's best friend***Directed by Hideo Tanaka****Reviewed by Charles Cashley**

What does a teenage girl say when she has been descended upon and surrounded by 20 highly-trained adult male soldiers who obviously have unpleasant intentions?

"I don't want to hurt you" - - of course.

Welcome to the world of the Sukeban Deka, an organization of girls who, we are told, "don't like the normal life of a teenager. Instead, they are dedicated to fighting for law and order."

They seem to fight boredom by fighting bad guys. The fantasies being appealed to here are those of Japanese teenage girls, not violence-loving boys. Japanese girls, we learn elsewhere, are somewhat bored with life in their society, which they see as decidedly less exciting than, for example, what happens across the Pacific. (In this movie, when the producers want to show a girl making a mighty sacrifice on behalf of her comrades in crime control, they show her giving up a trip to the United States.)

The teenage superheroine is a basic staple of Japanese pop culture. And we're not talking about any Nancy Drew here, solving crimes through gumption and guile. Nope, we're talking about a bunch of adorable little ass-kickers, as in the Go Rangers (Power Rangers).

The main weapon of the SD, besides their own sheer fighting ability is (laughably and symbolically enough) - - a yo-yo. Well, actually it's a "metal-razor yo-yo." It comes in amazingly handy in situations where most people would probably want to be armed with something a little more impos-



-ing, such as when the girls are being bombarded from a helicopter.

The point of the yo-yo symbolism is apparently to feed the fantasy that kids have particular skills and interests that, whether anybody realizes this or not, would be very useful in dealing with dismissive adult bad guys. In this particular episode - - one of many - - the SD are assaulting an offshore island that is the headquarters of a Bond-movie-like megalomaniac who plans to take over Tokyo. He is the principal of a school for delinquent teenagers that are trained to be his soldiers, unless they refuse, in which case he tortures and kills them.

The Bond-like plot is accompanied occasionally by cool, Bond-like jazz. And there's even a weapons-gadgets guy who brings in the latest in high-tech assault yo-yos.

The action here is not particularly stylish or inventive. The most remarkable skill the girls display is the ability to keep their legs covered even though they are fighting in skirts and are kicking, rolling and flying all over the place. (This is all the more evidence that the target audience is female.)

The movie is grittier than your typical after-school children's adventure show. There's some brooding by the girls, for example, about how the world is a nastier place than it appears to be on the surface. Still though, the after-school style is a take-off point. There is, for one thing, no sex to go with the violence. (An 18-year-old girl, upon having a bad guy get in her face, says that's the closest she has ever been to a man.)

And neither the girls nor the boys in the island school live up to the title "delinquents" as the word would most commonly be understood in this society. These are adorable, earnest, high-principled kids whom somebody apparently misunderstood at some stage.

The Sukeban Deka world is, indeed, a whole world; one in which boys tag after girls and keep getting themselves hurt, and in which girls take no crap from the adult world. If any fantasies beyond those of Japanese high-school girls are fed, it is apparently an accident. (*Come on Charles, I can think of a few fantasies they conjure up...and last I checked I was neither Japanese nor a high-school girl. -Ed.*)

## **DEATH POWDER**

**Directed by Shigeru Izumiya**

**Reviewed By Tim Merrill**

This is my first review that I've proudly done for ATC and what a doozy! I wasn't sure what to expect from **Death Powder** when I threw it in the VCR. After twenty minutes I felt something kick me in the synapses and I knew I was in for a halluci-

natory treat via some twisted Asian mind candy. Melted colors and blurred, filtered images swam around my picture tube and I started to think that someone had thrown in a batch of those special mushrooms into my beer again. The best way to watch the film is to let its dark visuals and twisted film style wash over you like a wave. This is the perfect kind of thing to throw on at a party with the volume turned off. It's totally overwhelming and fascinating at the same time.

I couldn't help but feel that director Izumiya was influenced by several twisted filmmakers in his dark surreal take on technology. The influence of films like **Videodrome**, **Hardware** and obviously Shinya Tsukamoto's **Tetsuo: Iron Man**, can be felt all throughout this mind-chewed flick. Much of the nightmarish imagery in **Death Powder** totally reminded me of the art of Hideshi Hino in his manga book, **PANORAMA OF HELL**.

There is so much visually going on in this film that the plot is hard to pick up on at first but with repeated viewings everything makes sense. Sometime in the near future of Neo-Tokyo, a trio of renegade soldiers-of-fortune heist a stolen bio-cyborg, the **Guernica**. Little do they know that the android is still active and is capable of infiltrating their minds with its biological weapon - - the **Death Powder**. Director Izumiya plays Harima, the first of the trio to be taken over by the **Guernica**. Harima turns on his young partners Kiozi and Norris, and soon Kiozi is taken over by the **Death Powder**. As Kiozi succumbs to the bio weapon of the **Guernica**, he starts to trip badly into his mind and then the film fun begins.

Many will see it's obvious that **DEATH POWDER** was filmed on a low budget, but Izumiya makes up for this in his filming style. The film jumps from b&w to film to video with multi-layered imaging. Electronic pulses streak across the screen like spermatozoa and walls of flesh shimmer and glisten, breaking down, and reconstructing itself at the same time.

Kiozi's drug-saturated mind takes him



-One inhabitant of *DEATH POWDER* world-

## DRIFTING CLASSROOM

Directed by Nobuhiko Ohbayashi

Reviewed by Frank Kilzer

I really go for strange films and videos. This movie, **DRIFTING CLASSROOM**, challenges me to come up with a more appropriate adjective than just plain "strange." What kind of movie is this? The film tries to cover a lot of bases. It's a disaster/survivor story, a sci-fi flick (a la **DUNE**, **E.T.** and **OUTER LIMITS**), and also a musical! The credits say it is based on a series of comics. Sure, that's common enough. The only actor of immediate familiarity was **Troy Donahue** (!) who plays a teacher that's a real wuss.

The story starts out being about a teenager named Shou. He lives with his mother in the city of Kobe but spent a lot of time living in the US. Shou attends the international school where there are students of mixed ages and ethnic backgrounds. His teacher, Ms. Midori, has just gotten engaged. Her students find out and this is where the first musical number takes place. During the production number an earthquake strikes! Panic spreads throughout the school as it is buried in sand and dust. When the Kobe rescue squads arrive, there is only a huge gash where the school once was. A geologist concludes that a "timeslip" was responsible and the people in the school are now lost in time and space.

Meanwhile, the survivors have also realized that they are not on Earth anymore. How this is handled is something else! Though the situation is extremely bad, none of the remaining adults try to take charge of the chaos. The teachers seem incredibly weak and they let the older students run everything important, such as food rationing. The adults are in fact more of a problem than anything else. A few have even gone nuts!

An election is held and Shou is chosen to be leader. A test for him is against one of

back to the origin of the *Guernica* and its creator Dr. Loo. A struggle begins between the new life provided by the *Guernica* and the world of the dead, inhabited by the nightmarish Scar People. Kiozi find himself being pulled between giving up his flesh to the Scar People or living the life of a zombie under the power of the *Guernica*. In Izumiya's world there is no happy ending.

The message is clear that in our glorification of technology we may wind up speeding ahead of the natural process of the death and destruction of life.

Shigeru Izumiya has created a film that manages to stretch its boundaries to the limit and screw with people's minds in the process. As with **TESUO**, **DEATH POWDER** has shown enough proof that you don't need an outrageous budget to create visionary films of future technological nightmares. It's really great to have some fresh Asian mind-candy to chew on...and something to scare the hell out of your friends when they drop by for a visit.



the insane male adults. Shou defeats him in a fight by using noodles and a baseball bat as weapons. The second day opens with an electrical storm coupled with an attack of some giant beetles. They tear up the place until Ms. Midori plays music on a piano which calms the bugs. Later, the youngest boy, Yu, is found playing with an E.T.-type alien that the older boys want to use for food. This leads to the big fight between Shou and his main rival, Mark. Shou beats the taller soccer player and strengthens his position as leader.

Shou then decides to put together an expedition to look for water away from the buried school. During the search, a tornado overtakes them. The twister is actually a sort of time-riff that lets the boys see their home. The group returns to find that though they were only gone a day, a whole month has passed at the school. Most of the people have died due to the constant attack of the giant insects. Shou's party seems to have watched every episode of "MacGyver" as they create a giant crossbow and plan a trap for the monsters. Mark gets to play his "big soccer game" by being bait. Most of the pupils and all of the adults are pretty much history by this point when a new time-riff vortex arrives. This vortex is only strong enough to carry little Yu home. His alien friend has now undergone a metamorphosis and has turned into a giant beetle which for some reason is friendly to the remaining students. And by some miracle it rains for the first time.

This film is like one of those so-bad-it's-good movies. The special effects are very good and that looks like where the budget was spent. Many of the effects are trippy as well as well-executed. The opening earthquake scene is done with odd colors and slow-motion as well as jump-cuts. As for the story, it was bizarre and definitely plays out like a comic book fantasy. The dialogue was at least 50% English and I wonder if this had been planned for a wider release. All in all, **DRIFTING CLASSROOM** screwed up my sleep pattern for a few nights.

## YAMATO TAKERU

**Directed by Takao Oogawara**

**Reviewed by Tim Merrill**

Fantasy films of the far East have come a long way thanks to Tsui Hark and his **Chinese Ghost Story** series, as well as more recent films like **Bride With White Hair** parts I & II. These films pulled you in with break-neck acrobatics, dazzling costumes, and legendary tales...all in all, a total feast for the senses. It seems that with each new film, these directors are trying to create visions more fantastic and outrageous than ever before. In the case of **Yamato Takeru**, this film shows that less can be just as good as more.

In a lot of ways, **Yamato Takeru** reminded me of the monster movies of Toho studios of the 70s crossbred with the classic Ray Harryhausen effects of the Sinbad films. This film is great to sit down and watch with kids on a Sunday afternoon. This film is not a ground-breaking film like the Sinbad movies or the **Chinese Ghost Story** series but it does the two things that have always hooked me on a film: it tells a good story and it delivers the goods.

**Yamato Takeru** is a tale about the gods created at the beginning of time and how they lay dormant for thousands of years waiting to be called upon by man. Two brothers are born in the country of Yamato -- Osamumko and Takeru. Both are destined to be King, but the birth of twins is a bad omen to the throne, so Takeru is taken to be executed by the King. The baby is saved by

a golden Phoenix and is raised under protection by his aunt. The King's advisor, Tsukinha, plots against Takeru and plans on controlling the power of the Dark Gods to do his bidding. Takeru grows and gains the knowledge of the power of the gods to become "the Soldier of the Gods."

As Tsukinha plots and manipulates the dark powers of the gods, Takeru is blamed

for the evil acts that occur. Takeru soon becomes banished from his own land and must journey to clear his name and destroy the evil raised by Tsukinha. As Takeru becomes stronger under the power of the Gods of Light, his evil adversaries also become stronger and more menacing. The journey begins with a group of ragtag heroes and ends with a battle of epic proportions.

The effects of *Yamato Takeru* are not state-of-the-art but work within the film's frame none the less. The battles and monsters in this flick totally kept reminding me of those classic Sunday afternoon sci-fi movies. Sure, some of you might think that the Kumaso War God looks a bit cheesy and that the dragon is a rip-off of Gidrah, the three-headed monster...but think again. It's not the fact that *Yamato Takeru* is lacking as a film but rather that most of us have been spoiled by much more extravagant fantasy films.

I like the fact that this movie doesn't try to beat you over the head with it's content. It tells an epic story and provides classic characters and monsters. Anyone can get into *Yamato Takeru* as a light, exciting adventure film to spend a couple of hours with. If you want extravagance, look to *Tsui Hark*; but if you want an old-fashioned fantasy, look no further.

## ATROCITY

**Written and Directed by**

**Katsuya Matsumura**

**Reviewed by Scott Williams**

This film is literally the video equivalent of a car wreck...a really sick one. I don't mean this because it's particularly gory (although it is pretty sick). I mean, like a car wreck, you may not *want* to look but no matter how much rubber-necking it takes, you do look...and stare...and gawk. Like that, you get about 15 minutes into this film and you

*-One of the many Atrocities in ATROCITY*



no longer *want* to look but you do look...and gawk...*Atrocity* is a hard film to watch. Did I make that clear?

Basically, it is the story of a nerdy teen named Shinichi (played by Masa Endo), who has just gotten out of school for summer break. His hobbies seem to include his computer and his ceramic girl doll. Well, those and daydreaming about elementary school girls.

Now Shinichi is being tormented by a gang of slightly older thugs who want \$1100 from him for some reason that is never fully explained. The leader of this gang is a gay guy (portrayed by Kanori Kadomatsu) who has some pretty nasty sadistic habits. I mean, if the gay-rights activists that criticized *Silence Of The Lambs* for its gay villain saw this flick, they would be shitting bricks. He is *that* sick. What makes him all the more creepy is that he appears almost like a rich-boy-next-door type. Among other things, we get to see him kill a hamster with his hands, pour some kind of adhesive into one of his lovers' ears, and brutalize a young girl he has kidnapped.

Anyway, this gay villain (no name given so I will refer to him as GV) has a thing for Shinichi. He even has a picture of them together on a train although their real relationship is never fully explained either. In order to get Shinichi closer to him, he makes him come to his house for dinner where he introduces Shinichi to his girl torture slave. GV then shows Shinichi how much fun humiliating her can be and leaves the room. The girl pleads with Shinichi to help her but accidentally vomits on him. He gets pissed and starts to kick her which GV captures on videotape to use against Shinichi.

Okay, this is part of the story, but simultaneously there is this whole other subplot: While on his computer, Shinichi meets someone going by the screen name, Good Man. Shinichi tells Good Man that he is in a bad situation and Good Man offers to meet him to help him out of it. Of course, Good Man doesn't show but two other hackers do. Shinichi explains to them why he needed Good Man and they offer to give him the \$1100. They go back to Shinichi's house to party and invite one of the guy's girlfriends over also. (Shinichi's parents are away on vacation.) So, of course, GV and his gang show up which leads to more torture fun.

Although most of the scenes are torture oriented, **Atrocity** is surprisingly non-graphic. (Which is not to say that it ain't sick... 'cause it is.) Cigarettes are used to burn genitals, a girl is drugged and spanked and abused in a bath tub, a mini-blowtorch is applied to various body parts and the list goes on. I guess, if nothing else, the director should be commended for being able to achieve repulsiveness without actually being gross.

As a matter of fact, when the film was completed, it was denied release. Even after cuts were made, it was still denied release due to the overall "tone of the subject matter."

Although a lot of the actual plot is pretty convoluted (including an odd plot twist at the end), the basic torture theme is pretty

linear. Plus, both sexes are abused equally which in itself makes this an odd Asian torture flick.

The one question that comes to mind is: what were they thinking? A recurring quote in the film is that "everything is meaningless" so I guess that would have to be the answer. Let's see...good looking cast, hard-to-follow story, cool camera work, brutal sadism...You know, I think I hated this movie. Maybe not though. Better go look at the car wreck one more time...

## **POOL WITHOUT WATER**

**Directed by Koji Wakamatsu**

**Reviewed by Steve Sanders**

I once worked with this guy named Kevin who was a total weirdo. He was really quiet and very strange. I mean, he really was weird enough where you didn't want to talk to him. Especially if he talked about women. I've talked trash with the guys about doing women six ways sideways etc. But when Kevin talked to you about them, it made you feel slimy and you wanted to take a shower afterward. It was *that* bad. Kevin got fired one day, not so much for job performance but mostly just because people got tired of feeling dirty. I always wondered what happened to him. Well, if he had been Japanese, I would swear **Pool Without Water** would be a documentary about him.

One night he sees a woman almost raped. He watches until they almost do actually rape her and then finally chases the guys away. He goes home with the girl and she thanks him. This seems to give him some ideas. He goes back the next night via the window - - not to do anything but just to warn her that she should lock her windows.

Before we know it, however, he's purchased a shitload of formaldehyde and is knocking out women while they sleep, having sex with them, and leaving before they wake up.

Now this could have been done in total exploitation fashion but the director, **Koji Wakamatsu**, doesn't stoop too low. Instead, this whole thing is so creepy, it almost turns into some bizarre low-key love story. The guy does rape lots of different women but for the most part, he picks on one waitress in particular. It gets to the point where after he knock her out and does the deed, that he then cleans her house and makes her breakfast!

The whole film is very atmospheric and really draws you in. Again, it isn't so much a cheap tittle flick but a good thriller and it really does have a lot to say about how we all interact with each other. This is especially evident after our "hero" gets caught.

The whole series of rapes he commits with the knocked-out women is very strange. It almost isn't rape but more like some bizarre love (especially with the waitress).

I'm afraid my review here doesn't do this film justice. It was great in a subtle, weird way. I guess the best way to put it would be - I wanted to take a shower when it was done...

## AVENGING QUARTET

**Directed by Siu Wing**

**Reviewed by Eric York**

**Avenging Quartet** has a power- house cast. The cast includes Girls-with-guns femme fatales **Moon Lee** (Angel series), **Cynthia Khan** (In the Line of Duty films), **Yukari Oshima** (Beauty Investigator), and **Michiko Nishiwaki** (In the Line of Duty III, Whore and Policewoman).

The story revolves around an ancient painting which contains documentation of war crimes committed by the Japanese during WW2. The painting is stolen and smuggled out of mainland China by **Waise Lee** (Bullet In the Head). Cynthia Khan, Lee's lover, takes a leave of absence to find him.

During her search she is befriended by **Moon Lee**. Unknown to them both, they are in love with the same man. They are soon joined in the search by a comedic Hong Kong police detective. Meanwhile, Michiko Nishiwaki, and Yukari Oshima team up to locate the missing painting. They hope to return it to Japan so they can conceal the war crimes and save the Japanese from embarrassment.



Unfortunately, despite the fine cast, the script for this film doesn't quite measure up. This movie feels like there were two script writers. One thought they were writing a comedy, the other thought they were writing a tragedy. Taken alone, the comedy scenes are mildly amusing but they don't fit with the rest of the picture. The second time I viewed this film I watched a friend's copy. My friend had edited out all the unnecessary subplots. I enjoyed this version a good deal better despite its brevity.

Like many Hong Kong movies, this film suffers from too many subplots. Viewers expecting another **In the Line of Duty III** or **Angel** film will be disappointed. If you don't mind fast forwarding past the slow points, the climactic fight scene more than makes up for what is lacking.

## HIGH HEELED PUNISHERS

**Directed by Takashi Kodama**

**Reviewed by Steve Sanders**

**Starring:** The D-Cats, Manami Morimura, Minori Sonoda, Tsutomu Hori, Kenzo Ogiwara, Michiyo Yokoyama.

It's always interesting to hear the current crop of Hollywood directors talk about themselves or their movies. When the conversation invariably gets around to influences they always bring out the big boys such as "Citizen Kane," "The Seventh Seal," or any other hoity toity film we've heard about a million times.

Well, I bet if you asked Takashi Kodama what his influences are, I bet he'd respond with a bit lighter fare such as "Private School," "The Last American Virgin," or any other teen sex comedy from the early 80's. This is because he's got the formula down. Can you say "Gratuitous Nudity?" I thought you could.



**-The high-heeled D-Cats**

**High Heeled Punishers** tells the story of three waitresses turned crime fighters who, unlike your typical heroines, barely wear any clothes. Decked out in leather bustiers, garter belts, stockings and foot crunching high heels, they fight the good fight while we get quite a good view. It's sweaty work too, so we also get to see them shower when they're done. Ahh, bless the gods of exploitation.

Most of their activities seem to be directed at somehow harming the genitalia of rapists, whether it be with impotence inducing shots (delivered from one giant hypo) or via leather restraints/torture items. I found these

scenes had me squirming a bit, but everything is done with a nice comedic touch, so it isn't that bad.

The D-Cats, who perform the theme song for the film are very attractive and decent actresses. Even if they couldn't act, I guess we wouldn't miss the point too much. The plot is pretty slim, involving them taking on shady rapists businessmen while avoiding the cops at the same time. Of course one of the cats falls in love with one of the cops. And of course they have a nude scene. You get the idea. There are some decent action scenes and if you like a no-brainer with lots of T & A, this ones for you.

## STREETFIGHTER 4

**Directed by Ishii Teruro**

**Reviewed by William Roberts**

I started watching Kung Fu movies back in the mid 70's with the **Bruce Lee** craze. In Hong Kong, Bruce Lee was the baddest guy around. In Japan, **Sinichi "Sonny" Chiba** was the baddest guy around. He didn't need anyone. He didn't want anyone. I can remember sitting and watching Chiba. In the finale of the original **Streetfighter**, he ripped out his opponent's heart with his bare hands. Sure, the movie reeked with

overacting, bad make-up, and atrocious dialogue, but Sonny Chiba was intense. He would glare out from the screen and you just knew that if anyone could rip your heart out, he could.

Now here we are face to face with **Streetfighter 4: Triple Play**. He still rips out his opponent's heart in the movie's finale but what a difference a few years make! This time he is no longer a loner. He is working with a team of crooks whose job it is to steal the Pharaoh Diamond. All in all, a good idea...a caper film. The only problem is that the caper is being run by the Three Stooges.

Here are three of the best - - a fighter, a thief, a criminal mastermind - - and they act like a poor man's version of the Stooges. In one scene, they spike one another's drinks with dandruff and boogers while the other isn't looking. In another, Chiba holds one nostril and shoots a line of snot on his partner. In still another scene, one of the crook's clothes catch fire. Using his quick wits (and extremely healthy bladder), Chiba puts out the fire. And these are supposed to be dangerous criminals?

The plot is a convoluted mess which ends with the threesome finally stealing the diamond...only to be captured by the police who devised the entire plan in order to capture these criminals. In the process though, a number of people are hurt and/or killed. Now if the police planned all this, aren't they responsible for all the deaths? Suspension of disbelief is one thing but suspension of common sense is entirely something else!

So, in my opinion, if you see **Streetfighter 4** on the rental shelves, use some of that common sense and rent something else.

~ATC~

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of Action  
and Exploitation

## GIRLS FROM CHINA

**Directed by Wong Tai-Loy**

**Reviewed by Frank Kilzer**

It might be better to call this film "Girl From China" since it revolves around one young woman named Chow Ying. Fresh off the train from the mainland, Ying first stays in Hong Kong with distant relatives. She is not quite as innocent as she seems but still rebuffs a lecherous uncle. Not wanting to deal with any more manhandling, she leaves. She then lands a job in a department store and after a slow start does well. More obstacles come up: Female co-workers who are jealous of her good looks and a walking sexual harassment suit of a boss. The only person that is good to her is a young man named Kent.



A designer and artist, Kent seems the right man for Ying. Their romance kindles slowly. Framed at the store for stealing, the despondent Ying goes to him. They make love almost like they are rewriting the Kama Sutra. Here you start to notice that Kent shows some possessiveness and tells Ying

he wants to marry. Ying, however, does not want to be just a housewife. She is determined to make it in this capitalistic city and leaves in the morning.

The world of insurance sales is Ying's next venture. She has no clients until she reunites with an old Beijing girlfriend, Joyce. Since Joyce makes a good living on her back, Ying learns that a soft sell (along with a beautiful body) gets the customers. Soon she is an ace salesperson. Ying then lands a huge corporate account and snags the CEO in the bargain.

Enter Marco, the just-back-from-Yale son of the insurance company president. He and, now marketing director, Ying hit it off right away. The CEO she was living with is dumped and wedlock with Marco is in sight. Of course, this is perfect timing for Kent to show up. Three years have passed and he is even more obsessed. Ying agrees to meet him at his apartment where the now violent Kent binds and rapes her.

The rest of the movie deals with what Ying must do to get rid of Kent as Marco has no idea of what is going on. Her own cunning and ruthlessness now really shines through.

The cast is good but the actress that plays Ying really stands out. This is her picture all the way. Showing her acting range as her character is hot and sexy while being cold and devious at times. The actor that plays Kent also shows a cruel-to-be-kind acting job that works. The pace is good and the story is sort of realistic without being very predictable. My own verdict is **Girls From China**, though not memorable.

## THE LOVERS

**Directed by Tsui Hark**

**Reviewed by Jayson Chan**

**THE LOVERS**, directed by Tsui Hark, Hong Kong's equivalent to Steven Spielberg, is a visually beautiful adaptation

**-Pop Idol Nicky Wu stars in THE LOVERS**



of the classic Chinese tale, **The Butterfly Lovers**. But like **ALWAYS**, Spielberg's foray into romantic-fantasy, Tsui trades in genuine emotion for grand spectacle, and the resulting film is surprisingly hollow.

**THE LOVERS** begins as a comic boy-meets-girl story that turns to tragedy akin to *Romeo and Juliet*. Chuk Ying-Toi is a girl from a wealthy family who would also have to be considered a free spirit; thus in an effort to 'tame' her, her family sends her off to Sung Yee College to study as a scholar (the equivalent of a liberal arts education). Of course, a college education is reserved for men only, so Chuk must disguise herself as a man to gain admission. Before she leaves, she promises her mother not to have "body contacts" with any other student.

In an effort to keep her promise, Chuk sleeps in the library away from the other

male students, but bumps into Leung Shan-pak (Nicky Wu, a HK pop idol), a poor student who must sneak into the library at night to study. Through a series of comic events, Chuk and Leung become best friends, and once Leung finally discovers Chuk's true gender, lovers. However, as Leung prepares for his final exams to become a Scholar, Chuk is suddenly summoned back home; through the wishes of her cruel father, she is to participate in an arranged marriage with the son of a powerful neighboring family. Her parents learn of Chuk and Leung's planned elopement, and attempt to keep them apart by all means possible. This leads to Chuk's literal imprisonment and Leung's eventual death (and a load of heavy-handed crying scenes), culminating in the kind of spectacular grand finale Tsui Hark is famous for, where even the heavens conspire to reunite the two lovers.

A film with such a powerful theme should be effective, but strangely, **The Lovers** is not entirely successful. When Leung and Chuk's planned elopement plunges the movie headfirst into high melodrama, I felt unconvinced. Upon reflection, I believe the fault lies in their early "romantic" scenes - Leung and Chuk making funny faces at each other, helping each other study by pulling the other's hair when they feel sleepy, playing soccer, etc. These scenes are built on comical situation, and do not reveal any genuine, resonant emotion; when the film suddenly turns deadly serious, their relationship feels contrived. For example, when Leung is forced to write a letter rejecting Chuk in one of his final scenes, he 'flashes back' to an earlier instance of the two making "bell ringing faces" at each other.

However, since the basis of their relationship just isn't convincing or moving, this little bit of melodramatic artifice simply rings hollow. Tsui seems to rely on mixing "wacky" humor with the more serious material (e.g., Chuk's father is always worried about his complexion and wears goofy

makeup), a feature found in many H.K. films. "Wackiness" may be used as a quick-fix for shallow characters, but in this case, it just doesn't work. Instead, it undermines the credibility and seriousness of the film's latter half and reveals the filmmakers' desperation for "depth".

The film also introduces a secondary character into the fray only to be conveniently used, then forgotten. As Leung discovers that he has feeling for his "male" friend, Chuk, he expresses fear that he may be becoming a "Ting Mong-chun", a classmate he describes as "sissy". Ting Mong-chun is portrayed as a potentially interesting character, and not just a caricature or target of laughter; he is shown as being unusually fond of Leung, is jealous when Chuk "steals" Leung away, and appears to show some emotion for Chuk (as a male) during their soccer game. Is he supposed to be gay? What are his true feelings for the others? Why bother to even feature this character? Unfortunately, this is left completely by the wayside. In an effort to rush the main relationship forward, the filmmakers have forgotten any additional subplots, subtexts or themes they had appeared to be developing. The last time we see Ting, he conveniently lends his carriage to Chuk just when she needs it. It would seem that many things "conveniently" happen in the film; they are just amplified by the weakness of the central romance.

This movie wasn't profoundly successful with its hometown Hong Kong audience who normally regard the "Tsui Hark" label as a mark of quality, and it's not hard to see why. Now don't get me wrong, **The Lovers** is a technically stunning film; the final doomed-wedding-procession scene is worth viewing alone. However, beautiful cinematography cannot compensate for the film's core weakness - its couple's less-than-convincing relationship. If Tsui Hark had spent as much time in adding some genuine emotion as he did with the thunder and lightning, **The Lovers** may have been one of his greatest films.



## DAUGHTER OF DEVILFISH

**Directed by Aag Mang**

**Reviewed by Eric York**

**Daughter of Devil Fish** spins a fairly interesting yarn. It seems to be based on an old Chinese folklore tale. The viewer will probably recognize elements from *Snow White* and *Cinderella*.

The story concerns a dysfunctional family (is there any other kind?) living in a Chinese village sometime in the early part of this century. The family consists of a man and his two wives, each of whom has a daughter. The first wife and her daughter are total saints while the second wife stands in for the wicked stepmother. This is an interesting touch as the wicked stepmother doesn't usually make the scene until the first wife buys the farm. Another interesting change is that the father is not some wimp who gets pushed around by his second wife. In this case, the father is a unsympathetic type who likes to beat his first wife and her daughter.

The first wife in the family is blessed (or cursed) with being reincarnated shortly after death. This is fortunate for her as she tends to die a lot! The father is in a foul mood because he can't seem to catch any fish. He decides the best thing to do is to beat the hell out of his first wife and throw her in the river. In quick succession the woman goes from a fish to tree and finally a gold bush. Her high mortality is due to the family catching on to her reincarnation act. However, once she reaches the bush stage, she is pretty safe. Gold Bushes are pretty good at defending themselves.

The story progresses in some predictable and not so predictable ways. As might be expected a prince (or something like that) shows up and the two daughters both vie for his affections. I enjoyed this film on two levels. On one level it's a pleasant folk tale. On another level there is plenty of unintentional comedy. The most hilarious being

the village celebration where the villagers are listening to instrumental music of "Deep in the Heart of Texas," "Yankee Doodle Dandy," and the "Star Spangled Banner." I guess they didn't think anyone would notice.

If you require loads of action then this film is not for you. On the other hand if you are a big fan of *Cinderella* or *Snow White*, then maybe you'll enjoy the Chinese version.

## ASSASSIN

**Directed by Chang Chueh**

**Reviewed by John Crawford**

This epic action-adventure film, set in the 18th century, tells the bloody story of Tong Po Ka whose forbidden love transforms him from a simple farmer into the number one killer/swordsman.

Po Ka's *forbidden love* is portrayed by the very beautiful **Rosamund Kwan Chi-lam**. This fine actress is best known to audiences as "Aunt Yee" in Tsui Hark's *Once Upon A Time In China I, II, and III*. Her performance here is top notch. The film opens with Kwan's character, Yiu, and Po Ka in a romantic interlude. They are planning to run away to start a new life together. When they try to leave the next morning, however, angry villagers accuse Po Ka of kidnapping and other crimes despite Yiu's protests. He is sent to prison where, because he has been unrepentant and smashed the courtroom and his jailers, he is subjected to "the Eye-closing Penalty" (eyes sewn shut). Throughout his tortures, he visualizes his lost love to gain his inner strength.

Po Ka is given a chance to regain his freedom when he must kill seven other prisoners to survive. All have had their eyes sewn shut and each one is more crazed than the one before. He survives but his freedom is costly. He must serve the evil eunuch Nga i Chung Yin and join his band

of killers. Meanwhile, Ngai renames Po Ka, calling him Tong Chop, as in "chop in two halves." Chop works hard putting his past behind him as he soon becomes a great swordsman, second only to Sung Chung, the eunuch's #1 killer.

Chop becomes friends with another killer named Wong Kau, played by **Benny Mok Siu-Chung**, known to many as "Leung Fu in Hark's *Huang Fei Hung* series. His character in *Assassin* is the young killer who wants to be the best; he lives the killer's life to the fullest but he know no master and his selfish pride is his undoing.

Chop (Po Ka) allows Wong Kau to take credit for one big kill. Then on another killing mission, Wong must finish the killing of a child when Chop freezes upon seeing Yiu in the crowd. This sighting of his long lost love brings all the memories back to Chop and he flees. Wong Kau sees him as weak and Ngai is betrayed.

The troubled Chop seeks out Yiu and finds she has married and had a son named Sam Po. She lives with her husband in the place Po Ka had wished to take her. He is ashamed of the evil killer's life he has led until he is able to use his sword for good. He saves a baby horse and its mother and the villagers treat him like a hero. This reverie is short-lived however.

Seeking revenge for Ngai, Sung Chung arrives and burns the village. Tong Chop emerges from the flames and kills the evil Sung, realizing he can not leave the killer's world. He knows that others will be sent to find him if he tries.

The final sequence of *Assassin* is a tour-de-force of martial arts. The movie is full of classic kung fu battles and intense sword-play with many beheadings, torso-splittings, severed limbs, poison drinks, beautiful young girls, giant dildoes, perverted eunuchs, betrayals and gruesome revenges. The director keeps the action moving with fluid camera movement and crisp editing.

If you are a fan of the swordsman genre in HK cinema, then this film is a "must see."

## FIST OF LEGEND

**Directed by Gordon Chan Car-Suong**  
**Reviewed by Steve Sanders**

**Starring: Jet Li, Chin Siu-Ho, Ada Choi**  
**Siu Fun, Nakayama Shinobu. Action**  
**Director: Yuen Woo-Ping.**

Let's just cut to the chase: *Fist of Legend* kicks ass. My ass. Your ass. Anybody's ass. It's one of those Hong Kong movies that I start watching, sit there slack-jawed and in awe of the action, until I get up and call up my friends and force them to watch it with me.



Jet Li plays Chen Zhen, a student studying overseas. Upon hearing of his martial arts master's death, he heads back to Japanese occupied China to pay his respects. Once he arrives there, he discovers that his master was poisoned. After a bit of investigation, he uncovers a plot to destroy China's ability to resist a total Japanese invasion.

With a nod to Bruce Lee's *Fists Of Fury*, *Fist of Legend* has a classic 70's Shaw Brothers look and feel to it. It lends the film a sense of realism that is rarely seen in today's HK flying-people fare.

The story is top notch and Li and the rest of the cast turn in stellar performances. The main reason to watch, though, is for the action. The kung fu sequences are nothing short of amazing. The final fight pitting Chen against an evil Japanese general has to be one of the finest ever put to film. It's incredible non-stop excitement with a minimum of wire effects...fantastic old time butt-stomping kung fu.

If you like your HK actioners to have an intelligent story, great performances and incredible action, get this one NOW. If not, get the hell away from me. You're an idiot!

## **SUBMERSION OF JAPAN**

**Directed by Shiron Morika**

**Reviewed by Jillian Sandell**

**Starring: Satsuki Kobayashi, Shiron Kawanami, Hiroshi Touoka, Aumi Ishida.**

As a paranoid fantasy about whether or not the world would come to Japan's help in the event of a fatal earthquake (a government official asks late in the film, "should I have Japan removed from the map now, or wait for official confirmation?"), *Submersion of Japan* works fairly well.

Opening with a computer generated image of the formation of the continents over the last 200 million years, the film centers around some recently discovered seismic activity on the ocean floor off the coast of Tokyo. What follows is a rather slow meditation on the fact that environmental problems are also political problems (scientists predict - - correctly - - that Japan is about to sink so politicians are forced to ask countries around the world to take in Japanese refugees). A parallel plot centers around whether it is better for the

Japanese people to die with their country (as one scientist argues) or whether government officials should try to save as many people as possible.

Exasperated that Japan can be the leading research nation in the world yet have only one submarine, the first hour focuses on the scientists exploring the underwater exploding fault-line and discussing the fact that Japan is on the verge of destruction. These scenes, however, which are badly lit, feature uninspired dialogue and uneven editing, never really transmit the enormity of the situation. Also, when they talk about "corruption at the foundation" we know they are referring to more than the physical foundation of Japan, but we never see the political and economic corruption such dialogue is clearly alluding to.

The latter half of the film, which takes place in government offices around the world, never reaches the kind of climax such a story demands and it is hard to feel invested in what's going on -- even as we see Tokyo in ruins and the thousands of hysterical Japanese verging on a riot.

The romance between Onodera, one of the scientists, and Reiko, the daughter of a local business man, seems out of place and somewhat gratuitous, although is clearly meant to suggest the personal aspects of the imminent catastrophe. Unfortunately, their minimal screen time together, together with the fact that what time they do share doesn't exactly sizzle with desire or love, turns their relationship into a confusing and unnecessary aside.

At nearly two hours, *Submersion of Japan* is about 40 minutes too long. The rather cheesy special effects of earthquakes, tidal waves and exploding volcanoes don't help, and spoil the otherwise naturalistic look of the film. Similarly, the overly sentimental score and heavy-handed use of slo-mo as people flee the about-to-be-destroyed nation doesn't work well. Overall, a rather slow and serious film. But if you want to learn about how mantle convection works, and why earthquakes happen, this is the film for you!

## PASSION 1995

**Directed By Fok Yu-Leung**

**Reviewed by Jayson Chan**

**- Simon Yam**



In a stroke of marketing genius, **Passion 1995's** jacket art - - **Christy Chung** and **Simon Yam** perched on a shiny black motorcycle, brandishing huge firearms - - gives the impression that the movie within is in the same vein as such wannabe 'cool' love-and-murder-on-the-run flicks like **Natural Born Killers** and **Love And A .45**. Luckily for us, this is a case of blatant false advertising since the movie doesn't feature a single frame like those on the cover. Instead, **Passion 1995** is a flawed but energetic example of Hong Kong's new self-consciously 'hip' cinema, where everyone has an attitude and no character seems more than an arm's length away from a new Jean-Paul Gaultier outfit.

Like a smaller scale and linear **Pulp Fiction**, the film crosses the paths of a multitude of eccentric characters living in modern Hong Kong: first, Tina (**Christy Chung**) is a 'big sister' to a small gang of too-cool street kids. She and Dragon, her boyfriend, solidify their eternal devotion to each other in the opening scene by bungee-cord jumping off a building. When a shady druggist molests one of the gang (who just loves over-the-counter medication), Tina and Dragon come to the rescue, soundly beating him while deftly removing one of his ears. As revenge, the druggist's boss, Brother Ba (**Wu Yu Cheng**) sends for Dragon but, instead of killing him, falls in love (!).

Meanwhile, Dick (a miscast and weary-looking **Simon Yam**) arrives in Hong Kong from America in search of his old girlfriend Kuen. This leads him to her old apartment, now occupied by Gucci (**Teresa Mak Ka-Kei**) a tough talking slacker type and her mentally unbalanced mother, Sasa (**Yuen King-Dan**), who pines all day for her imaginary lover Johnny. Dragon, now under the

care of Ba, convinces Tina to act as a drug courier. In a nod to/parody of **Chungking Express**, Tina dons a blond wig and sunglasses to make the delivery but not before she performs an extended dance number with her gang in the middle of Causeway Bay to the strains of Anita Mui's "Funky Fun Funky."

In a series of coincidences involving Ultraman, drugs and comic books, Dick accidentally picks up Tina's delivery while Gucci meets her 'line friend' (telephone personal ad date), Siu Wei, a mild-mannered cop (**David Wu**). This leads to the best scene of the movie - - when Tina attempts to recover the drugs from Gucci's apartment only to face a stand-off between a deranged Sasa and the rest of the group. Tina enlists the help of Dick, convincing him that she knows where Kuen is, only to find that Kuen has married the police commissioner. In the finale, after much double-crossing, Dragon, Ba, Tina and Dick meet which leads to the seen-it-before chase and final confrontation.

**Passion 1995** suffers from plot holes a mile wide; however, its fun dialogue, hyper-stylization and cinematic energy tend to

compensate. Take, for example, the stand-off in Gucci's apartment: Tina, in a blond wig and feather boa, fights off Dick and Gucci with a vacuum cleaner while attempting to suck up the spilled cocaine; Sasa takes Tina hostage while screaming for Johnny, only to be joined by Siu Wei, who's no match for the crazed knife-wielding mother. Had the remainder of the film kept the momentum of this scene, it would have been more successful. But sadly, it doesn't.

I should add to the film's problems the absolute dud performance by Christy Chung. Yes, the same actress that nearly sank **Bodyguard From Beijing** makes portions of this flick almost unbearable. Her portrayal of a tough street girl is laughable as her every action and line delivered seems forced and unnatural. Christy may be a popular idol but she is inadequate for the role, dragging many of her scenes, and subsequently the entire picture, down.

The real standout performance comes from Yuen King-Dan as the demented mother Sasa. Her completely over-the-top acting pushes many sequences forward that would otherwise have been average. As a testament to her appeal, she even makes Chung's out of whack dance number bearable! In addition to Yuen King-Dan, Teresa Mak Ka-Kei gives a solid, fun performance as the money-hungry Gucci with the proverbial heart of gold. I would much rather have seen these secondary characters given the spotlight instead of seeing the main ones served in their dull and predictable manner.

I would like to assume that initially the makers of **Passion 1995** had their heads and hearts in the right place when they started the film. But somewhere, about halfway through the script, they seemed to become afraid of the chances they could have taken and settled for conventional mediocrity as the movie's denouement. This is unfortunate because the movie has some genuinely fun moments, only that are not carried through. But I guess that any filmmakers

that would end their flick with Simon Yam dancing to "Funky Fun Funky" while wearing a black mouse-eared beanie can't be all that bad.

## HONG KONG EVA

**Directed by Wu Ka-Kun**  
**Reviewed by Charles Cashley**

Don't expect anyone called Eva in this action/sex romp featuring Tong (actor?), the gentle ex-con and reluctant hero who befriends a group of women and restores their faith in men. Opening with an old man tricking one of the women into helping him across the street so he can then feel her up, Hong Kong Eva centers around a group of girlfriends and their troubles with men. A series of vignettes highlight how men use and abuse these women -- Betty has her wallet stolen, leading to a kung fu fight (she wins), she is also being hassled by Frankie, the evil karaoke bar owner who wants to have sex with her; May and Connie sell luxury apartments and have sex with prospective male buyers (with names such as "Tiger Penis") to make the sale (and a little extra money for themselves on the side). Finally, the kind and gentle Ann is mugged at random on the street.

Coming to their aid when each of the women, in turn, has some sort of violent confrontation with these men, Tong intervenes despite his promise to his daughter that he will never fight again after his wife was killed several years earlier during one of his fights. Tong is also having problems with men, however, and is fired from his job when they discover he has been in jail for murdering his wife's killer. Now employed as a car-washer, Tong knows his background and class make him an unsuitable suitor for Ann, but they nevertheless fall in love. The tender scenes between the three of them - - with Tong's daughter playing matchmaker - - are extremely touching and

moral center of the film.

In the course of the story Connie betrays Betty -- who has also fallen for Tong after he helps her-- to Frankie, and she ends up injured in hospital after trying to escape. A confusing plot leads to a finale where each of the women, and Tong's young daughter, are killed by Frankie and his henchmen, leaving only Tong alive but emotionally broken. There are some good fight scenes, especially early on with the women, and watchable although unerotic sex. And ultimately the fast-moving -- if sometimes incomprehensible -- story-line makes up for an otherwise mediocre film.

## **GODZILLA VS.** **SPACE GODZILLA**

**Directed by Kensho Yamashita**  
**Reviewed by Scott Williams**

**Starring: Jin Hashizume, Emi Kodaka, Towako Yoshikawa, Akira Nakao and Akira Emoto.**

The film opens with explosions and credits. Explosions, mind you, that are there just to appear behind the credits it would seem. We then move quickly to the G Force Center at the United Nations, which apparently houses the Psychic Center. Dr. Saegusa is being asked to back the T Project, which would be an attempt to control Godzilla by way of telepathy as a means of subduing him. It is accepted that this would be better than the Omega Project which basically just sets the big G guy up with a series of challenges. Dr. Saegusa is torn because she does not feel that controlling Godzilla is possible.

Cut to Shinjo and Sato on a ship in the South Pacific, then as they land upon the beach of Birth Island. As they scale a mountain on the island, they meet the mysterious Mr. Yuki who saves Sato from a

deadly critter bite. (Because of the print, I couldn't tell if it was a spider or a scorpion or what...but Yuki stabbed it anyway so...) So, it is then that we meet Little Godzilla -- a huge, cute, little Godzilla that has taken a shine to Mr. Yuki.

Cut to some government type guys talking about a tragic NASA accident aboard a spaceship which is attributed to a "huge monster." They decide to get some expert opinions about what that monster could be.



All of this jumping around means one thing: a big bad monster from somewhere out in the vast regions of space is on its way to Earth to challenge Godzilla for control of the planet. (Being only a casual Godzilla viewer, I was actually unaware that Godzilla controlled the Earth.)

So, this brings us to Space Godzilla, who is bent on destroying or controlling the world...one of the two. Now, Spacey looks just like Godzilla except for the huge rock candy crystals that protrude from his back and shoulders. And the explanation for this

is definitely inspired if not idiotic - - the G cells that make up a Godzilla could only have been transferred into space by either Biolante or Mothra, (and I quote), "...the G cells must have been swallowed into a black hole in space and then out a white hole as a type of mutation...and during the incubation, a type of transformation occurred, energized by a crystallization by the stars manifested in the large crystals on his back...the birth of a horrible monster." Yikes!

Anyway, all this still just means that we will be led through a series of subplot developments which will all lead to a final confrontation by beast and beast and man. One okay subplot involving Saegusa's kidnapping by the mafia or the government (or both) leads to her being used as a human shield while tied to a bed. Kinda cool idea. But then she uses her telekinetic power (which she has never used despite her other psychic abilities) to levitate the bed so that Shinjo can get a clear shot. Still kinda cool. But it has NOTHING to do with anything. This is the case with most of the theorizing and most of the action. They waste like 10 minutes just having Spacey fly OVER stuff.

There's other stuff going on involving the MOGERA project but who cares...this film may be an attempt as a throwback to the Toho glory days of the 70's but it fails on most accounts. New director and new composer were supposed to equal new direction but who really wants to travel down the well-worn PC path? Who really wants a cuddly Godzilla? And even worse, a cuddly Little Godzilla? All the cuteness made my teeth hurt.

In the film, Spacey's mutation is explained even further. I will use that here as the finale of my review - - "Space Godzilla took the worse qualities of the G cell, corrupted by the pollution in our atmosphere...if the universe continues to be contaminated, who knows what kind of creature will be next. This was a warning from God to human beings." 'Nuff said. If the big guy keeps get

ting contaminated, who knows what will be next...This is a warning from me to all human beings that read ATC.

## **THE HEROIC ONES**

**aka Thirteen Fighters**

**Directed by Chang Cheh**

**Reviewed by John Crawford**

Revenge, burnings, traditional dance numbers, drinking (drunkenness), lechery, attempted rape, plotting, more revenge, dynastic intrigue, pageantry...all the elements of a classic Shaw Bros. production (filmed in *Shawscope*!) are all included in **The Heroic Ones**. This gem of the classic age of kung fu movies is directed by the great Chang Cheh who is clearly the fore-runner of modern day filmmakers like **Tsui Hark** and his contemporaries. If you've seen any of Hark's films (**Huang Fei Hung 1, 2 and 3, Zu: Warriors of Magic Mountain, Swordsman**, etc.), you should check out this film.

This epic features **David Chiang** in the role of the 13th prince: a powerful young fighter, one of thirteen brothers who all seem to be skilled martial artists. Chiang, at the time, was a rising young star at the Shaw Bros. studio. Western audiences saw him paired with the late Peter Cushing a few years later in the Hammer-Shaw Bros. co-production **The Legend Of The Seven Golden Vampires** (aka **Seven Brothers Against Dracula**).

The 13th prince is the favored son of the king with 13 sons. He appears to be the youngest, brashest, strongest, and most charming of the brothers. His lofty status with the king causes jealousy among a couple of his brothers which leads to a gruesome family feud. Throughout this adventure there are a number of excellent fighting scenes. The last third of the film is full of great swordfighting and super kung fu.

Director Chang Cheh has made over 100 films in his long and illustrious career. His work for the Shaw Bros. studio represents the best films produced during the 1960's and early 1970's at that most renowned motion picture factory. His use of lighting and costumes to establish character is outstanding here. His camera seems to be always moving into the action and the editing draws the viewer in to the story at hand.

All the performers do well in their roles. **Ti Lung** performs well as the 11th prince as does **Chin Han** in his role as the eldest son. Han turns in a surprisingly poignant performance. There are many good scenes in **The Heroic Ones** but one of the very best is an extended scene in which **Ti Lung** must rescue his father from an assassination attempt and together they must fight their way out of the enemy's city.

This is apparently a complete version of the film and it contains one of the bloodiest, most visceral murders that I can recall seeing in any Shaw Bros. film of that era. It took me completely by surprise and I loved it. The screenplay, up to that point, gives no indication of this scene happening and when it does, it blows you away. There are some universal ideas and concepts included in the film that are clearly expressed without spoken words. Clearly Chang Cheh and **The Heroic Ones** deserves a place of honor in the history of global cinema.

## A WOMAN A SHE-WOLF

**Directed by Tso Kin-Nam**  
**Reviewed by Daniel Grissom**

Blech!! Not much else can be said about a movie this damn depressing. The film details the tragic series of misfortunes affecting the life of pretty (filmmaker's opinion, not mine), young Yun-ni. And despite the tragedies, I was very happy at the film's

end; because it was over. (Old joke but it holds true.)

Yun-ni used to have it made. She had a job and a boyfriend. Unfortunately, he left to go overseas and she decided to accept this other guy's marriage proposal because she feared he may never return. When Lin Hu (the new guy) finds out she isn't a virgin, he is furious!! Eventually, we find out that not only is she not a virgin but that she is pregnant. Lin Hui finally decides to divorce her but she refuses and he beats her into submission.

So now she is a single mother with no job. After running out of money with no place to live, she reluctantly decides to become a prostitute like her sister Kai-Chi. She quickly learns the craft of ripping off ugly, old Asian men.

Of course, she's miserable and depressed, so it's time for her life to take a turn for the worse. She holes up with this ex-trick who turns out to be a gambler, a user, an abuser and a cheater...not to mention ugly again. He forces her to make money to pay off his debts and occasionally rapes her.

This healthy, modern relationship goes on for quite some time until one day when he is beating her that she bludgeons him with a piece of exercise equipment. And what does our "lovely" heroine do? She then throws the body in a trunk and off a cliff. Poor Yun-ni.

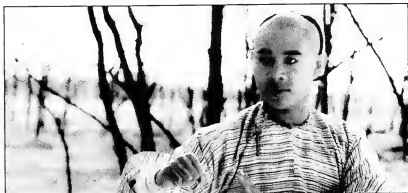
After getting drunk and reflecting on her pathetic life, she leaves her kid with her sister and turns herself into the police. That's it! That's the end. No police investigation; no shootout; no fugitive-type running; no lycanthropy; nada.

I think the film is set in Taiwan, late 70's or early 80's but I'm not sure. There are quite a few sex scenes but everyone involved repulsed me and they were dull and filled with unattractive people. Plus, the subtitles were almost non-existent and although I missed a lot of dialogue...I really don't think it mattered all that much. There are better things out there...find them.



# ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE EAST

A Review Of The **ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA** series  
by Holger Wacker



□ □ □

With **Once Upon A Time In China**, Tsui Hark not only revived the classical kung fu movie but also the myth of the martial artist and Confucian healer Huang Fei Hung as well. Huang was a real-life person, born in 1847 as a descendant of the monks who became famous as the "ten tigers of Shaolin." His father, Lu Acai, taught him kung fu and he regularly won the Lion King competitions. Huang Fei Hung died in 1924.

In 1949, his screen life began with **The Story Of Huang Fei Hung, Parts 1 & 2**. The then 43-year-old Kwan Tak Hing, who played the title character, succeeded in becoming *the* Fei Hung of cinematic history. Lots of Fei hung movies followed - - they amount to about 100 films according to some sources. The best Fei Hung movies, like 1955's **Huang Fei Hung Vied For The Firecrackers At Huadi** and the following year's **How Huang Fei Hung Vanquished The Twelve Lions** not only characterized the protagonist as a superb martial artist but also as a complex person. As the action

scenes were crucial to these movies, they attached great importance to realism.

Tsui Hark, however, well-known for his fantastic screen world, made his Huang Fei Hung movies balletic fantasies of kung fu. He himself directed three of them and he produced the fourth installment directed by Yuen Bun. **Once Upon A Time In China, Part 1-4** are the topic of this article and I shall refer to them as Fei Hung 1, resp. 2, etc. The original Chinese titles are **Wong Fei Hung, part 1** etc. Here it's "Wong" and above, "Huang." Chinese named are spelled in various ways when translated in to Latin letters. Sometimes the hero's family name reads Huang, sometimes Wong. His given name varies from Fei Hung, Fei Hong, Fey Hong to Fey Hung. All of these are correct.

After the first Opium War, China was open to the British, the Americans, and the French by 1846. Canton was one of the main areas where hostile feelings and resistance were aroused against the imperialists. During the following years, the situation

became more critical and the Fei Hung movies are settled in this political climate of the last decade of the 19th century.

**Fei Hung 1** (1991) starts in the 1870's. Huang runs a clinic with Porky and the western-educated Buck Tooth Sol, who has certain problems with the Chinese names of medicines. Western imperialists' superior technology, especially firearms, as well as corrupt Chinese politicians and guardians of order serve to burden the Chinese with unfair trade arrangements. (We didn't have anything like GATT in those days, with light years of negotiations.) Huang is an instructor in the *black flag* army. When his superior is detached, he gets the order to transform parts of the army into a local militia. Huang has some enemies amongst the new commanders and the evil Sha He gang. These brigands collaborate with the Americans, and with empty promises about gold waiting to be had, they lure Chinese men as workers to America. There they are used as economic wearing parts. In addition, they kidnap Chinese women to sell them for prostitution.

The business partner of of the Sha He gang is Mr. Jackson. (He reminds one of

Thomas Jackson, a powerful man who for thirty years ran the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank at the end of the 19th century.) Master Yim (=Yen=Yan) comes into town. He is impressively introduced, killing a rival in front of a huge burning pyre. As it is his intention to found his own school, he must first make a name for himself. Therefore he challenges Huang. Young Foon is impressed by Yim and joins him as a pupil. Events are culminating now.

The breath-taking final duel between Huang and Yim with bamboo ladders takes place in a storehouse. Simultaneously, some women including Huang's love, 13th Auntie Yee, are being transported by the slave traders to Jackson's ship. Yim loses the fight against Huang and dies in a hail of bullets from western firearms. While dying, he comes to the realization that Chinese kung fu is inferior to western weapons; Huang rescues Yee and the other women. The district government realizes imperialism's true face.

**Fei Hung 2** (1992) shows Huang, Yee and Foon traveling to Canton by train, where there are several camps are at enmity with each other: the



extremist White Lotus sect that kills foreigners and westernized Chinese, and the imperialists, this time mostly British. The local police maneuvers between these two groups and we therefore have a constellation similar to that of the first part. Originally, Fei Hung wanted to give a lecture on acupuncture at a medical congress but he is involved into the conflict more and more. In fact, he is forced to fight three duels. The first against the commissioner of police, taking place beneath a network of hanging lanterns. Its dynamics and severity equals the fight in **Fei Hung 1**, which introduces Master Yim. During the final two duels, Fei Hung kills his enemies. He fights the high priest Jiu Gong atop a tottering tower of wooden tables and he fights the commissioner of police in a storehouse (again!) and kills him in a narrow passage, which has walls of clay allowing for some quite effective bashing scenes.

**Fei Hung 3** (1993) is set in 1895's Beijing/Peking. Huang, Yee, and Foon visit Huang's father who runs a martial arts school and a medicine factory. Empress Ci Xi and foreign secretary Li Hong Zhang proclaim a Lion King competition. The leader of one of Beijing's martial arts schools, Zhao Tian Ba, threatens some schools, forcing them to lose the competition. Because his father is concerned, our hero is once again drawn into the conflict. As this is transpiring, there is a Russian in town trying to prevent the signing of an international treaty that would be damaging to Russia. This is done by making an attempt on the foreign secretary's life. Coincidentally, the Russian is also an old acquaintance of Yee's and wants to win her heart. Several involvements result but all takes a turn for the better in a furious finale. **Fei Hung 3** ends with Huang's speech to foreign secretary Li, pleading for reforms to improve the common people's quality of life.

The three Fei Hung movies are quite similar in content and form. There are some major parallels I'd like to mention briefly as well as some interesting developments run

ning through the three films: All the movies have Fei hung challenged to a sort of primary duel by a main opponent but the duels always end with no victor. Just think of the first fight between Fei Hung and Master Yim -- this fight takes place at Huang's Hospital during a heavy rainstorm and ends prematurely by Fei Hung's attention being distracted. The fight between Fei Hung and the commissioner of police between the hanging lanterns is similar. The commissioner turns out to be a most dangerous opponent but he cuts the fight short and talks with Fei Hung over a drink. The first meeting between Fei Hung and Club Foot in FH3 also is a very short interlude. But everything changes with the final duels. The first Fei Hung wins brilliantly; he's lucky during the fight with the commissioner; and the third duel doesn't take place at all. Club Foot goes over to Fei Hung's side, regretting his past and his affiliation with Zhao Tian Ba's gang. This comes after a crucial experience involving Huang's father fixing Club Foot's broken leg. A lot of fans expecting the movie to follow the same pattern as parts



*-director Tsui Hark*

1 and 2 reproached FH3 for the exclusion of a final duel. While FH1 is a melodramatic movie of gloomy atmosphere and sparse comedy, the following two sequels are lighter in tone and much more humorous.

Travelling by train to Canton, the trip proves to be an adventure of a special kind to Huang, Yee and Foon in FH2. Huang manages to eat his soup in the rattling, jolting train well in contrast to Foon who develops really exotic table manners. The steak, however, proves invincible to them both. Yee is very much amused by their table antics but only until Huang accidentally flings his steak into her face due to his unique handling of knife and fork. Later on, Huang and Foon enjoy themselves immensely in telling the westernized Yee that the Chinese dish she has so obviously enjoyed was made from dog meat. FH3 contains several of these type of humorous situations. For example, Huang catches his father's pupils and Foon with their swords hidden in their trousers just before the counterattack against Zhao. Another scene depicts the friends watching a kung fu movie that Yee has compiled in time-lapse. This may well be read as an ironic comment on the way kung fu is brought to the screen today.

There is also a kind of umbrella-running-gag throughout the series: When in part 1, emotions begin running high, Huang cools them down with his umbrella. In part 2, he disciplines members of the White Lotus sect with his umbrella. In part 3, a cape replaces the umbrella.

Romantic scenes between Huang and Yee don't go unnoticed...on the contrary, they become more and more important. FH1 hints at the couple's love. In one beautiful scene, Yee is seen caressing Huang's shadow on a wall. In FH2, Huang is jealous of Foon, who is in love with Yee. While Huang teaches yee elementary kung fu, she translates this into a waltz. The, in FH3, Huang and Yee finally want to marry; they kiss and embrace each other in public. Huang also shows himself to be very jeal-

-Rosamund Kwan as Aunt Yee



ous. In one scene, he rushes up and with the words, "I'm just in time," prevents Yee's Russian admirer from kissing her hand. The Russian regards Huang as a rival and a comic scene follows when Huang shouts after *Aunt Yee* and the much-relieved Russian as whether Huang is Yee's nephew.

Once Yee teaches Huang English, she explains that "I love you" is a phrase of welcome. And while is intonating, "Aunt Yee, I love you. I love you..." on and on, Yee dreamily replies, "I love you too."

By the way, in all three movies Auntie Yee is kidnapped. In FH1, she is to be sold as a slave. In FH2, she's kidnapped by members of the White Lotus sect. In FH3, the same thing happens to her by followers of the Zhao Tian Ba.

Of course, Tsui Hark's *Fei Hung* are far from just costume-actioners and period pieces. Inherent to all three of them is the political climate of the day. The fear and certainty of being taken over by (or falling

back to) mainland China in 1997 are obviously an integral part of the movies. Especially the White Lotus sect is a reference to what may come and its high priest Jiu Gong may be seen as a precursor or double of China's leading head, Deng Xiao Ping. Tsui Hark clearly shows that his sympathies are not on the side of the dogmatists, corrupt politicians or police. The repeatedly mentioned sentence, "China must open up to the West," contrasts with the Chinese pride of their national identity, which includes kung fu and the Peking Opera as symbols of this identity.

**Fei Hung 4** (1993) opens sometime after part 3. Fei Hung and Yee have been married and while Fei Hung as a character is still present (although JetLi has been replaced by **Lao Wen Zhiou**), of course but Yee is completely absent. Foon, Club Foot, and "Old Master," Fei Hung's father, band together with Fei Hung to form the "invincible quartet" (four-leaf clover) and oppose the imperialists of eight nations. There are political undertones (Boxer Rebellion) as

well as another appearance by an umbrella. The White Lotus sect is replaced by The Ladies Of The Red Lantern. Humor is more labored than comical. The imperialists are speaking an awful German or English respectively. There are still fights and this time out the finale also has two very strong opponents. One fighter, for example, is able to chop off heads and send horses to dreamland by a mere blow of his fist.) But because of extreme close-ups, there isn't much to be seen during some of the fights. The film is not badly made but the three lion-dance sequences are a bit annoying and much too long. Whether Lao Wen Zhiou is better or worse an actor than Jet Lee is negotiable but after three films in a series, one becomes accustomed to Lee as Fei Hung.

All in all, the **Once Upon A Time In China** series, at least parts 1 through 3, is excellently crafted. One would very much like to see it at a theatre on a large screen. The movies' stunning beauty often even makes you forget to look at the subtitles.



*Lao Wen Zhiou and Jean Wang*

*[Once Upon A Time In China 4]*

春歌

# FORBIDDEN SONG

by Tom Weisser & Yuko Mihara Weisser

One of Japan's most controversial filmmakers is attacking a new medium. **Kazuo Komizu** (better known as "**Gaira**" in the cult circles) is responsible for a variety of low-budget shockers, including **Entrails of a Virgin**, **Living Dead In Tokyo Bay**, plus **Rope and Violence**, **Female Teacher Scandal** and 5 more. Now **Gaira** has written and produced a new music CD which is causing a stir in Japan.



The music is a combination of Japanese "folk" verses (sung by traditional vocalist **Kikusui Maru Kawachiya**) with heavy contemporary percussion, similar in concept to the kind of thing **Malcolm McLaren**'s been doing for a few years (remember his disco/rap version of **Madam Butterfly**?). This disc is in Japanese Language only, so it's not particularly user-friendly for the average ATC enthusiast. The lyrics translate to a tongue-in-cheek ode praising the joys of sexual submission.



The compact disc is packaged with a 26 page full-size magazine, comprising of erotic poetry, lyrics (of course), a lengthy prologue to the disc, "adult" animation and lots of sado/sexual photos (incidentally, shot by **Gaira** himself) with popular sex queen **Sayuri Ichijo**.

"A vagina is like a temple  
The penis is an earless monk  
Who visits the temple with regularity  
And the monk cries with pleasure  
While walls expand in pain  
'Delicious' he spurts a cough  
And discovers Buddah in the Milky Way"

To put this controversial project into perspective-- it would be like **Johnny Cash** singing limericks written by **Russ Meyer** packaged with explicit cover photos of **Traci Lords**.

# **FEMALE NINJAS:**

## **The Magic Chronicles**

**A SERIES OVERVIEW by  
DANIEL GRISSOM**



### **The Saga Begins...**

Love and the many sacrifices it requires may not seem like a prime ninja-movie theme. However, in director Katsu Zushima's *Female Ninja: Magic Chronicles* series and Takayuki

Miyagawa's *In Bed With The Enemy*, the ninjas, despite their training and dedication, learn that they can never completely overpower their emotions...especially love.

But don't let a lofty theme like love frighten you off, these directors know to add enough sleaze and a wonderfully subtle sense of humor, to make this series of interest to any ATC connoisseur.

The four films in Zushima's *Magic Chronicles* series center around the lives

of a dedicated band of female ninjas, borrowed and/or inspired by Miyagawa's original film, **In Bed With The Enemy**. Obviously, the Zushima films have a different mood and style but he stays true to the real highlights of the original: magic and sex.

The ninjas of yesterday were highly skilled in an array of deadly magic. For instance, you could be killed by everything from "vagina bubbles from hell" to an acidic "rain of milk" from a female ninja's breasts. And for those who like to keep track of these things, each ninja magic trick is announced to its intended victim and its title is actually put on the screen. Wow.

Although the female ninjas are skilled fighters with deadly magic, each one of them must realize that her greatest weapon is her body. Hence, sex abounds as the ninjas fuck as many enemies as possible.

Despite the abundance of nudity and magic, Zushima remains focused on plot and characters. Each story develops into a complicated entanglement of deceit and

### -Sex and magic among the ninjas



betrayal. Zushima's favorite source of conflict: When lovers discover that they must become enemies to maintain their family allegiance. He repeatedly examines this theme throughout the series. Ultimately, he believes love is stronger than duty, but often his characters discover this too late.

I have decided, for no apparent reason, to first tell you about the four parts of the Magic Chronicles series and then talk about their predecessor, **In Bed With The Enemy**.

□ □ □

Number One - - Starring: Misuyo Shirajima, Gingi Seiou, Tazurou Atou and Oue Rikohayama. The first part of the series takes place in 17th Century Japan. A time when feudal warlords battled each other for power and family recognition. This film starts with a warlord, Hideyui, who has just lost his army, saying goodbye to his wife, Senta. Before the enemy army, marches in, Senta orders her female ninjas to copulate with her husband in hopes of carrying on his seed through children. Each tryst is very ceremonial as the warlord impregnates the female ninjas and then commits suicide. Senta and her ninjas survive.





News of his army's victory gets back to the enemy lord, Tokugawa, and the conflict is set as the ruling family wants Senta's ninjas (and the babies they carry) dead. To complicate the situation even more, we learn that Senta is actually Tokugawa's granddaughter. It is inferred by Tokugawa that Senta had been captured by Hideyui against her will.

As Hideyui lay dying, Senta prepares to off herself also. She is stopped, however, and dragged off to her grandfather. The reunion is, of course, less than a happy one. She tells him of her wish to die with her husband but Tokugawa is more interested in Senta giving up her female ninjas, as he knows they carry his seed and have sworn revenge against him. Senta, of course, refuses to bow down to her grandfather's demands so he proceeds to threaten to kill everyone she has ever known. Senta remains defiant and suicidal. Tokugawa then secretly hires powerful male ninjas to assassinate the pregnant females. The only problem is that the males are dying in equal numbers to the females. And so on and so forth...you get the idea.

What really makes this film great is the outrageous magic (well, that and lots of naked Japanese chicks is a plus also). The male ninjas use a variety of magic to drive women wild. For example, one blows bubbles with his sperm. Any woman touched by a sperm bubble goes into heat and must find and fuck the ejaculator. Another fave scene is one in which male ninjas attack one of the females, Oyui. She stops the attack with giant vagina bubbles which encapsulate the men and return them to the womb. (The male ninjas are encased in plastic bubbles with the sound of crying babies in the background.)

All of this, and the many fights and magic tricks I haven't mentioned, make for one hell of a series opener.

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Number Two - - Starring: **Yuki Kuroda** and **Kenji Yaguchi**.

Part Two, also known as **Secret Of The**

### -A scene from MAGIC CHRONICLES 2



**Christian Bells**, is set in 1649 and begins with a disturbance: a whore named Kara refusing a trick. The trick gets violent and tries to kill her but she is saved by a samurai. Kara immediately develops a big crush on him.

Next we move to a temple in Izo, where a group of government officials are weeding out Christians by making people step on a relief of the cross. The Christians are sent to prison. The leaders intend to wipe out Christianity completely.

And then we see a bound topless girl...a bell of Christ is found in her body by holding a crucifix close to her and listening for the jingling of the bell.

Matsuhira, the king, is after the 100,000 gold coins sent by the Vatican to the Catholics in Japan to help jump-start the religion. The treasure can only be found by collecting five bells hidden inside the bodies of five girls. The bells are hidden inside their vaginas. One great scene shows the beautiful bound topless girl being tickled by a feather until the bell drops from between her legs. (The king is left contemplating "what kind of a religion would hide a bell inside a woman's vagina?")

No need to worry that part two will be dull or anything...

Anyway, the basic story revolves around the recovery of the five bells and the fights and sex that are involved in doing so. As well as the conflict Kara and the samurai encounter between their love for each other and their polar allegiances. And for the record, most of the sex scenes look like pages right out of the Kama Sutra.

Magic tricks include the "Cherry Blossom trick," the "Serpent Tongue trick," and the ever-popular "Vagina Bubbles" make an appearance.

□ □ □

Number Three - - Starring: **Shirimi Wakabayashi** and **Junhiko Lida**

Part Three, aka **Sacred Book Of Sexual Positions**, begins by introducing us to Yukiya and Iyomasa, who are both doctor's assistants. Yukiya is secretly in love with Iyomasa.

Next we see the 13th emperor of the Tokugawa family. Sadly, the emperor has problems with maintaining erections as well as with premature ejaculation. The emperor's advisors are worried that he will not leave an heir. They figure if they can get their hands on the sacred book of sexual positions, it may solve their problems. This book, however, is owned by King Nakari and he will not share it.

The emperor decides to ask his son to steal the book for him. Iyomasa is his son and he knows he must accept the task. Yukiya, however, overhears his orders to steal the book and knows she must do something. She goes immediately to Kyoto to tell her father of the plan to steal the book and he asks her to keep it safe. He sends her off to seek advice from a family friend and has the male ninja, Gunki, accompany her.

At the same time, four female ninjas are enlisted to get the book back or at least the information within it.

Thus begins another amazing chapter of an amazing series. Both Iyomasa and Yukiya are upset that they must now be enemies when they are in fact so madly in

love.

In this episode, we are also given a female ninja who doesn't like men and a gay male ninja to add to the recipe. In one scene, after the book is given to the female ninja (because she runs fast), the gay male ninja is sent to retrieve it. He demands the document and she refuses, of course. The stand-off lasts until nightfall...each afraid to attack the other. They finally decide to try a sexual position from the book (?). The female uses her echo trick to send the lesson back to the others. When they are done, they each prepare to attack the other. The female uses the ever-popular "Vagina Bubbles From Hell." This time, however, thousands of tiny bubbles foam out from between her legs. The male uses his "Blade Of Fan" and he throws the fan like a boomerang and it slices her throat open. Her vagina bubbles still consume him and Gunki himself comes and retrieves the book.

Other tricks in the film include: the "Hair Trick" in which a female ninja uses her to strangle men like a rope; a "Magic Division" trick where the female can make her appear to be many versions of the same person; the "Rain Of Milk" trick where acid milk flies from a female's breasts like rain.



-Rain Of (Acid Breast) Milk

*-Promotional ecstasy*

All of this fighting and fucking (I'm sure the thin line between love and hate has never been as blurred as during this series) leads up to a showdown between Yukiya, Iyomasa and Gunki. The lovers are torn between their love and their familial allegiance. They decide to ask for advice from the doctor they worked for, leading to the inevitable happy ending. We, after a film of great action, magic and sex, learn a valuable lesson about love and premature ejaculation.

□ □ □

Number Four - - Starring: **Sekiko Ueno, Megumi Sakita, and Shoyako Iida.**

Next, for the fourth installment, we go to the year 1400. This is the end of Takamino Asano's reign and he is ordered decapitated while he commits hari-kari. The emperor's advisor, Yoshiyusa, escaped to Edo to draw up a rebel plan. He becomes the leader of the rebel force.

The new emperor (of the Vesui family) is confined to his castle for fear of rebel attacks. The new emperor's son enlists Otome to seek out and kill a list of names of those under the care of the Asano family.

Next we see a long nude bathing scene featuring the lovely Oyu (Otome's girlfriend) accompanied by funky modern music. Otome is forced to break his promise to marry her since he may soon die. She gives him the "bell of life." Oyu and her sister argue over whether she should have followed Otome, which openly expressed her love for him. Not coincidentally, the sisters are ninjas for the new empire and they are given the mission to protect and make peace with the listed six that Otome will attempt to assassinate...we have our conflict.

One great scene is during the protection of Gunbei, who can't make love because he is too worried that he may die soon. The female ninja uses her "Flower Eats Bug" trick and they make it on a huge backdrop of a flower petal. Gunbei becomes a sex maniac. Once he's done ravaging his woman, he realizes he has been deceived by the female ninja. To prevent any future



deception, he gouges his eyes out. Just then, an assassin from Otome's army comes in and the female ninja must defend him. He kills her by lassoing her and then using his "Fire Run" trick to make her explode. Otome's girlfriend and the other female ninja come and kill him. Otome sees this and announces that they are now enemies.

This entry in the series uses a lot more narration to introduce characters, maybe because there are a lot, and it also seems to be more basic and less intriguing. You don't identify with the characters as much as the others.

Another standout scene though involves an egg trick called the "Breast Bridge of the Rainbow." The female ninja uses this on a male and he gets so shamed for falling for the trick that he cuts off his penis. This is a gut-wrenching, painful-looking scene which ends with the female holding up his dismembered penis.

Although this is the weakest of the series,

all are definitely worth a look. The magic, the fights, the sex, the beautiful (naked) Asian women...who could ask for anything more.

□ □ □

**In Bed With The Enemy**, starring **Maki Tachibana**, **Magumi Hori**, **Keiko Kinugasu** and **Jirou Okazaki**, is the film that inspired the *Magic Chronicles* series. This is an older looking film with a much higher sleaze factor: more explicit sex and the violence is more brutal and graphic and yet it is not nearly as slick and well-produced as the series.

The movie starts with an attack on the Sanada family transporting the King's gold. The Yamagatsu are believed to be responsible for the attack. Three female ninjas are assigned with the task of regaining the gold and thereby maintaining the strength of the king.

In this film the rules of the female ninja are much more defined:

- 1) Never fall in love with a man, and
- 2) Never have a woman's feelings.

Also in this film, the female ninjas are much more powerful than their opponents. In the series the female and male ninjas are more equally matched and in the actual fight scenes, the males seemed stronger. Here, the females easily defeat the forces against them.

One great scene (of many) has a religious pilgrim asking a female ninja for information about their faith. He uses strange hand signals which signify deep questions. But she thinks he's signalling about the size of her vagina. So she tries to signal for a huge penis. She thinks he's saying he has a huge penis and wants an equally large vagina.

Although the basic plot is simple (the search for the gold), the fights and sex are great...especially one very explicit and erotic lesbian scene between a spy and one of the female ninjas. There are some plot twists thrown in and overall **In Bed With The Enemy** makes an admirable pro- or epilogue to a superb series. All or any of the five are highly recommended by myself and the friends with whom I've enjoyed them so wholeheartedly.



-Promotional still from IN BEDWITH THE ENEMY-

# TALKIN' TRASH

- A Continuing Feature of Dueling Reviews -

**This Issue's Matinee:**

## SCHOOL ON FIRE

Directed by Ringo Lam

REVIEW BY STEVE SANDERS

REVIEW BY CURTIS TSUI

Hong Kong sure has put out a shitload of these "...On Fire" movies. We've had **CITY ON FIRE**, **ISLAND ON FIRE**, **PRISON ON FIRE I & II** and **TIGER ON FIRE**. I swear a whole HK film crew is soon to visit me after I eat at Taco Bell to film "My Ass Is On Fire." Luckily for me, they haven't showed yet and I haven't "crossed the border" in quite a while. Luckily for me also, I got to review **SCHOOL ON FIRE**, a damn good movie.

**SCHOOL** is directed by Ringo Lam, who is responsible for many of the "Fire" flicks, and who happens to be a great director. Just ask Quentin "City-On-Fire-Inspired" Tarantino.

The film tells the tale of juvenile delinquent triad members as they begin to terrorize their school and neighborhood. Of course, they get good kids involved who should know better. You could call it "A Better Tomorrow Jr."

The movie follows Chu Yuen-Fong (Lee Lai-Yui) as she unwillingly gets sucked into the whole triad underground. After watching some Triad students beat up another good student, she makes the mistake of fingering them to the cops. This doesn't please the the head boss who is shaping these students up into mean, fighting triad machines. He makes her pay hard cash for her squealing.

Lucky for her, one of her best-friends is already involved with the triads as a prostitute. She gives her the money and at the same time introduces her to the cutest triad you ever saw. Of course she falls for him...and of course, he doubts his life in the gang and we all know he is good at heart. Soon her friend bites it and she has to whore herself to get the money. This doesn't sit well with her father who goes to rescue her from this life. Of course he dies, thus setting up the exciting conclusion.

This is a great film. Strong acting, good script and good action. Lam holds it together well, knowing when to slow the pace down and knowing when to crank it up, like near the end. I really enjoyed this movie and you will too. Now pardon me while I eat this taco...

It's no surprise that Ringo Lam isn't among the most widely renowned Hong Kong directors here in the States: his movies often contain sequences of excessive violence so mean-spirited and vengeful that most mainstream audiences would find them unpalatable, unlike John Woo's more aesthetically acceptable mayhem. This earlier effort by Lam (**PRISON ON FIRE**, **CITY ON FIRE**), an ultra-violent look at triads and their youth-gang contingents, is no exception. Although not quite as strong as his masterpiece, 1992's **FULL CONTACT**, it is nevertheless a powerhouse film featuring a strong cast (**LEE LAI-YUI**, **LAU CHUN-YAN**, **YUEN KIT-YING**, **LAM CHING-YING**, **CHEUNG YIU-YEUNG**), a pulsating score by Lowell Lo (**THE KILLER**, **GOD OF GAMBLERS**), and some very brutal action scenes.

The story follows Chu Yuen-Fong who, despite her poverty, has managed to do well in her studies as well as avoid a life of crime like many of her peers. This changes, however, when she witnesses the brutal killing of one gang's member by two of a rival gang and is plunged deeper and deeper into gangland strife.

Lam's film came hot on the heels of another examination of gangland youth which was simply entitled **GANGS**. Like **GANGS** (directed by Lawrence Ah Mon), **SCHOOL ON FIRE** presents the social ills of such misguided youths. The latter film, however, eschews the even-handed, objective temperance of AH's work in favor of vicious, adrenaline-pumping action and suspense filmmaking. It has clear-cut heroes and villains and there is no question that Lam wants the viewer to walk away with complete disgust for gangland ideals.

If one wants a serious, sociological look at juvenile delinquency and triads, **GANGS** would be a better choice. Yet **SCHOOL ON FIRE** succeeds rousing for what it is -- an entertaining, violence laden revenge flick. It's a solid pot-boiler that delivers the goods and won't disappoint it viewers, either hardened Lam fans or newcomers.

## P.S.~

Okay, so here you have Issue 9, which officially launches ATC as a six-times-a-year 'zine! Plus, it also marks my inaugural issue as managing editor. Tom and I both look forward to many more years of action and exploitation. As always, we also look forward to your questions, comments, rants and raves. Write to us at

PO Box 16-1917  
Miami, FL 33137  
E-mail: AsTrCinema@aol.com

Plus you Jackie Chan fans know that you can become of a member of the Jackie Chan Fan Club USA by writing or calling:

PO Box 2281  
Portland, OR 97208  
(503) 299-4766  
E-mail: chanfanus@aol.com

Thanks to Joy Al-Sofi, President of the club for getting us her info to share with all of you.

Last but not least, here's one more picture of director Tsui Hark. Why? Because I just bought the latest **Sparks** CD entitled, **Gratuitous Sax And Senseless Violins**. And there amongst the techno-dance revelry is a track called "Tsui Hark (I Am A Film Director)." WHOA! Anyway, it is a standard Sparks ditty with Hark listing his films and achievements over top of the synth track. It's way cool!



See ya next time,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Scott". The signature is written in dark ink and has a long horizontal line extending from the bottom of the "t".

< -director Tsui Hark



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